

Message Text

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CINCUNC KOREA

S E C R E T SEOUL 8512

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR MOPS PBOR KS KN

SUBJECT: DEFUSING WESTERN COASTAL ISLAND SITUATION

REF: STATE 245617

SUMMARY: AS INSTRUCTED IN FINAL PARA REFTEL, CHARGE CALLED ON FOREIGN MINISTER KIM AND DISCUSSED TONE OF ROKG PUBLIC POSITION ON COASTAL ISLANDS. IMPORTANCE OF AVOIDING UNNECESSARY INCIDENT WAS STRESSED. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING CALL ON NEW FOREIGN MINISTER, KIM DONG-JO, CHARGE RAISED WESTERN COASTAL ISLAND SITUATION AND MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. WESTERN ISLAND SITUATION HAS CREATED PROBLEM OF COMPLEXITY AND POTENTIAL DANGER. ANY DEVELOPMENT WHICH CHANGES PATTERN OF MILITARY RELATIONS BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH HAS SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS AND IN THIS INSTANCE THE ARMISTICE AGREEMENT IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR. LAW OF THE SEA AND INTERPRETATIONS OF TERRITORIAL SEAS ARE ALSO INVOLVED.

B. WE ARE IN A STRONG POSITION ON THE RIGHT OF ACCESS AND THE CONTROL OF CONTIGUOUS WATERS BUT THERE IS AN AREA BETWEEN THE TWO ISLAND GROUPS OFF THE ONGJIN PENINSULA WHERE A 12-MILE NORTH KOREAN TERRITORIAL SEA CLAIM AND THE NORTHERN LIMIT LINE CREATE A ZONE OF UNCERTAIN
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STATUS. IF AN INCIDENT WERE TO OCCUR IN THIS AREA IT IS ISSIBLE THAT THE ROK AND THE U.S. MIGHT APPEAR IN THE EYES OF A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF OTHER COUNTRIES TO BE IN THE WRONG.

C. THE ROK POSITION HAS BEEN FIRM IN ITS RESOLUTION TO MAINTAIN ITS CONTROL OF THE ISLANDS, BUT THE TONE OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS HAS BEEN IN OUR JUDGE-MENT SOMEWHAT OVERLY BELLIGERENT. THERE IS A DANGER THAT THE ROKG MIGHT APPEAR TO BE ACTIVELY SEEKING A SHOWDOWN.

D. WHILE MAINTAINING RIGHT OF ACCESS AND SAFEGUARDING ALL OF OUR BASIC INTERESTS UNDER THE ARMISTICE AGREEMENT, IT WAS VITAL THAT WE AVOID THE NORTH KOREAN TRAP AND NOT LET OURSELVES APPEAR TO HAVE PRECIPITATED OR INCITED AN INCIDENT.

2. THE FOREIGN MINISTER ASKED WHY THE WHILE PROBLEM COULD NOT SIMPLY BE HANDLED BY THE MILITARY ARMISTICE COMMISSION AND ASKED WHY THE MAC SENIOR MEMBER IN THE NEXT MEETING COULD NOT REQUIRE THE NORTH TO WITHDRAW ITS DEMAND. THE CHARGE REPLIED THAT THE ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM WHICH CAME UNDER THE TERMS OF THE ARMISTICE WOULD BE DEALT WITH BY THE MAC, BUT THAT THERE WERE OTHER ASPECTS THAT WERE NOT CLEARLY MAC ISSUES. THE SENIOR MEMBER HAD IN THE DECEMBER 1 MEETING FLATLY REJECTED THE NORTHERN DEMAND, AND WE SAW NOTHING TO BE GAINED FROM TRYING TO GET THE DPRK TO WITHDRAW IT.

3. AMERICAN BUREAU DIRECTOR KIM DONG-WHIE, WHO WAS PRESENT DURING THE CONVERSATION, INTERJECTED THAT THE NORTH RESPECTED THE NORTHERN LIMIT LINE FOR 20 YEARS AND WAS NOW GOING BEYOND IT TO A 12-MILE LIMIT LINE WHICH THE DPRK CLAIMED INCORPORATED THE FIVE ISLANDS. THIS THE ROKG COULD NOT ACCEPT. THE CHARGE SAID THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO THE ISLANDS WAS ACKNOWLEDGED, BUT THAT THERE WERE A NUMBER OF OTHER COMPLEX QUESTIONS ON WHICH WE WERE SEEKING GUIDANCE. THE CENTRAL OBJECTIVE WAS AVOIDANCE OF AN UNNECESSARY INCIDENT.

4. THE FOREIGN MINISTER SAID THAT HE WOULD ASK FOR A FULL BRIEFING ON THE PROBLEM AND WOULD BE READY SOON TO DISCUSS THE MATTER FURTHER.

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